

Night Journey to Vicksburg

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Review

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Masters, Susan Rowan *Night Journey to Vicksburg*. Silver Moon Press, \$14.95
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Coming of age

Becoming a man in the midst of slavery

Night Journey to Vicksburg is Susan Rowan Masters' fourth novel for young readers and the first that draws on historical resources. Set in the spring of 1863, just before the Battle of Vicksburg, this book illuminates history through the fictional story of three slave children who run away from their plantation to avoid being sold and separated. Like Masters' other novels, **Night Journey to Vicksburg** relies on vivid characterization and draws the reader in through the story's hero, thirteen-year-old Jubilee. When we first meet Jubi, he is paralyzed by his fear of making the wrong choice and haunted by a sense of having failed his father. He comes to realize that he must overcome self-doubt in order to save himself and his sisters. As Jubi learns to trust others--a dog, a wounded Union soldier--he is finally able to trust himself and to believe he can be a man like his father. The choices he makes end up being significant not only for his family, but also for the Union Army.

This is a beautifully-written, powerful story that focuses on a moment of crisis and growth in a single individual's life in order to communicate broader issues of bravery, self-sacrifice and the rewards of freedom. Susan Rowan Masters uses wonderfully descriptive language to convey the terrors of slavery and escape, and does so in a way that avoids sensationalism. This is a moving story that will be of great interest to readers of all ages. While the novel certainly could be used as part of a history curriculum, it will also stand alone as a coming-of-age story that transcends a single historical moment.

Julie Pfeiffer is an Associate Professor of English at Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia, where she teaches children's literature, British literature and

women's studies. She is the editor of Children's Literature, the annual publication of the Children's Literature Association and the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature.